

ABSTRACT

Criticism: An Encounter between Written Culture and Cyber Culture

Under the aegis of Thailand Research Fund (TRF), the research project “Criticism: An Encounter between Written Culture and Cyber Culture”, (being Part 4 of a series of research projects on criticism), starting from October 1, 2010, has completed its first phase of 18 months of the total duration of 3 years. The main goal of this project is to study the transition of criticism in 5 areas of the arts (literature, Thai classical music, theatre, visual arts, and film) from written culture to cyber culture in contemporary Thai society. In order to assess the continuity of criticism of the arts, the research team members made use of printed materials gathered under the research projects Part 1 & 2 (“Criticism as an Intellectual Force in Contemporary Thai Society”), studied criticism under cyber culture, interviewed critics and scholars, participated in relevant professional meetings, organized its own academic seminars, held monthly meetings, and finally presented the 18 month’s research results to the public on June 23, 2012. Despite the various ways of fulfilling the objectives by the individual research areas, it can be concluded that, on the whole, the team has reached all research objectives for this first 18 months.¹

In the context of Thai culture, several research areas still had to cope with remnants of traditional Thai culture, a kind of reticence not conducive to overt criticism. When compared with modern Western culture, it seems that Thai culture is marked by conciliatory tendencies. Regarding the scarcity of printed criticism in the world of Thai classical music, this applies also to other traditional art forms, such as traditional theatre and dance. This defect could be ascribed to the traditional ritualistic nature of the performing arts, while folk traditions operate with oral culture. It may be a truism to state that those arts that do not express themselves by linguistic means are naturally bereft of verbal criticism. No wonder that in the present research project, literary criticism delivers more written evidences than other fields. This does not mean that other non-literary-based fields do not have any culture of criticism. In fact, this research discovers that visual arts and music are rich in orally transmitted criticism.

Beyond that, key factors that impact the culture of criticism are the media’s policy that concentrates on commercial profits and certain legal limitations that impede freedom of criticism. A radical change has set in with the advent of cyber culture, whereby people prefer to communicate with short messages. Nevertheless, the virtual world offers great potential to both written and spoken culture. The cyber world does not only function as an archive for written

¹ The research objectives are as follows: 1) Arrive at overall conclusions as to the characteristics of Thai written culture, including factors that support as well as obstruct the progress of criticism; 2) Study new opportunities opened up to by the cyber world that are supportive of criticism, including their strengths and weaknesses; 3) Examine case studies of criticism at the border area between written culture and cyber culture; 4) Give advice to artists and critics, especially via the internet, within the framework of a “Criticism Clinic”; 5) Give suggestions regarding desirable developments of criticism in the future.

culture, but also facilitates borderless communication regardless of space, time and place. In addition, it can record and broadcast the spoken culture, thus lessen the need to access information only through the written mode. The research team finds that the main problem besetting cyber criticism has been a lack of quality. This problem might have been caused by the critic's lack of up-to-date knowledge that can match the progress of the arts, or simply because the artist has aesthetically as well as intellectually advanced far ahead of the critic. Another factor could be ascribed to the lack of participation from the elder generation of critics who remain more at home with written culture. The research discovers that the "middle-range critics" (age 35-45) seem to be instrumental in linking the two worlds, since they can operate in both written culture and cyber culture. A certain number of case studies from the so-called "middle territory" indicate that quality criticism is also possible in the cyber world. Examples can be found in almost all fields except Thai classical music and visual arts. At present, written criticism in print media still enjoys a higher status than its counterpart in cyber culture. This leads to the question of how better quality can be achieved in cyber culture. Greater efforts should be expended on the development of criticism in cyber culture in the future. Regarding the "criticism clinic", the literature field has had considerable experience in dealing with online critical activities, while other fields are beginning organize activities that motivate criticism. It must be said that the achievement of the literature field is a continuation from activities already initiated in the previous research (Part 3).

The research team received many valuable suggestions and comments from the research's evaluators and from the participants at the seminar on June 23, 2012, both of whom expressed high satisfaction with the research results. The following recommendations emerged from the seminar:

- 1) The scope of the research should be made clearer;
- 2) Terminologies hitherto used by the researchers should be clarified, defined and unified, namely, "the middle territory", "the borderline area", "virtual culture", "written culture", and "criticism" as related to the respective areas;
- 3) The title of the research project should be simplified to "Criticism: An Encounter between the Printed Media and the Internet"
- 4) The next 18th months should also pay attention to the role of the recipients of criticism in the cyber world.